

Murphy Renews Call for President to Bring End to War in Afghanistan

NEW

BRITAIN-Congressman Chris Murphy sent a letter to President Obama, renewing his call to begin the process of ending the war in Afghanistan and bring our combat troops home as quickly as is safely possible.

"Mr.

President, as a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, I must use this opportunity to reiterate my belief that since your speech [in 2009], the ground has so significantly shifted - both in Afghanistan and here at home - as to warrant a dramatic new timetable for withdrawal," Murphy wrote. "I believe that conditions now command us to wrap up combat operations as soon and safely as possible, but no later than the end of this year. The past ten years have cost us dearly in blood and treasure. We have lost more than 1,700 American lives and spent nearly \$600 billion in Afghanistan. Enough is enough. I am confident that most Americans agree with my belief that we should spend the next ten years investing in education in America, infrastructure in America, and manufacturing in America- not fighting in Afghanistan."

Full
text of Murphy's letter:

April
3, 2012

The
Honorable Barack Obama

President

The
White House

1600
Pennsylvania Avenue NW

Washington,
D.C. 20500

Dear
Mr. President,

You
have always rightly noted that American military strategy is never static - that it must always adapt to changing conditions. You reiterated this belief when you unveiled your plan to increase our troop levels in Afghanistan in late 2009, saying that the timetable for transition to full Afghan control of military operation would be determined by "conditions on the ground."

Mr.
President, as a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, I must use this opportunity to reiterate my belief that since your speech, the ground has so significantly shifted - both in Afghanistan and here at home - as to warrant a dramatic new timetable for withdrawal. I believe that conditions now command us to wrap up combat operations as soon and safely as possible, but no later than the end of this year. I write to you today to explain the rationale behind this belief.

At
the outset, let me offer my enthusiastic commendation of our military's conduct in Afghanistan. U.S. Armed Forces were given an extraordinarily difficult job in Afghanistan, and they have consistently performed above expectations. They destroyed al Qaeda's safe haven in Afghanistan, killed Osama bin Laden, removed the Taliban government that sheltered our enemies, and implemented a new counter-insurgency strategy. They have provided training for the Afghan police and army, and battled an endless stream of insurgents coming both from Afghanistan and across the border in Pakistan. During my three trips to Afghanistan, I have been consistently impressed by the professionalism, skill, and compassion of American troops and civilian personnel serving in Afghanistan. No matter the timetable for full withdrawal, we can be proud of the progress we have made, and our soldiers will return home as heroes.

But
the marginal utility of U.S. military presence in Afghanistan no longer merits our continued occupation. It is time for us to leave.

Why?
First, the foundation of our counter-insurgency strategy is the belief that when given a choice, the Afghan people will choose affiliation and loyalty to the government over the Taliban and insurgents. This proved to be true in Iraq, where millions of Iraqis eventually chose to rally against the Sunni insurgents when given real protection from American and Iraqi forces. The problem in Afghanistan is that three years after ramping up our military presence, there

is little evidence that the Afghans are making this same choice. Though I do not believe in setting policy based on anecdote, my most recent trip to Herat Province offered an illustrative example. Local farmers were receiving military protection from the insurgency for the first time since the American invasion, but they were using this protection to safely grow poppy in their fields which they then sold to the very insurgents that we were protecting them from. They accepted both our protection, and the Taliban's money, willingly.

Second, there is scant evidence that our work to create a functional local economy or improve the quality of national and local government is hitting its benchmarks. It is simply time to admit that there seems to be little correlation between the length of our occupation and the health of the Afghan economy and government. Billions in military and development contracts have enriched and corrupted a small elite, who have taken much of the money out of the country. The New York Times reports that \$4 billion left the country through Kabul Airport last year, in a legitimate economy of about \$15 billion. Despite our considerable aid and influence, a recent report by Human Rights Watch confirms that abuses against women and girls are widespread, and the Afghan justice system favored perpetrators. As for the goal of creating an effective and legitimate Afghan government - no credible expert believes that is possible in the near term, not by 2014 or even 2024.

Third, our continued occupation threatens to repeat the mistake of the war in Iraq in that extremists are increasingly using the Afghan occupation as a primary recruiting tool and rallying cry. Whether it be the mistaken burning of the Koran, the recent horrible massacre of Afghan civilians by a U.S. soldier, or the constant drumbeat of drone attacks across the border in Pakistan, the negative reaction to our actions in Afghanistan are, now more than ever before, cancelling out any good we are doing by fighting those very same extremists in Afghanistan.

Fourth, as you also noted in your 2009 speech, the cost of any foreign military endeavor must be weighed against the good that such spending could achieve back home. I am sure that when you announced this new strategy in Afghanistan two and half years ago, you had hoped that our economy would be back on its feet by 2012. It is not. And just as conditions in Afghanistan merit immediate withdrawal, so do conditions in this country. Even if you believe that our mission in Afghanistan is providing some benefit, it is time to ask whether that benefit is greater than the potential benefit of not borrowing \$2 billion a week in the first place, or spending all or a portion of that money building our economy at home. I know what the people in my district think.

Mr.

President, let me be clear - I am not advocating that we completely turn our back on Afghanistan. It was our abandonment of Afghanistan in the post-Soviet era that created the vacuum that led to the rise of the Taliban. This is a mistake we ought not repeat. On the contrary, I expect that we will remain deeply engaged in Afghanistan and the region long after our combat mission is done - just not as an occupying military force. We can still help train and

assist the Afghan police and security forces without a military footprint. We must remain committed to diplomatic negotiations between the government and key factions, including the Taliban, with the conditions your Administration has laid out. We can continue our work to build a new Afghan economy. And we may need to reserve some short-term ability to continue a limited counter-terrorism mission in Afghanistan and the region.

But these efforts can occur in a support role. It is now time for Afghans to lead the fight, and for our nation to focus on recovery at home. The past ten years have cost us dearly in blood and treasure. We have lost more than 1,700 American lives and spent nearly \$600 billion in Afghanistan. Enough is enough. I am confident that most Americans agree with my belief that we should spend the next ten years investing in education in America, infrastructure in America, and manufacturing in America- not fighting in Afghanistan.

This is the moment to initiate the transition, end the war in Afghanistan, and bring our troops home.

Every
best wish,

CHRISTOPHER
S. MURPHY

Member
of Congress

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